*Professor Surjit Singh, a diehard movie fanatic, period. He is a retired Theoretical Physicist. He has been watching Hindi movies since 1952, has been collecting Hindi songs, movies and magazines since 1969, and has been writing about these things since 1996. He has had a website since 1999, http://hindi-movies-songs.com/joomla/*
*He has published seven books on Hindi films, four jointly with others.*

# Ramniklal Shah: An Early Studio Pioneer

PROF SURJIT SINGH

# Ramniklal Shah: An Early Studio Pioneer

Professor Surjit Singh

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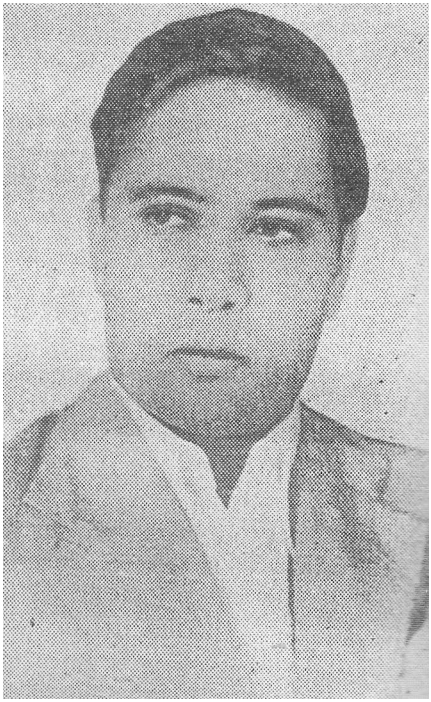
# DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to Ramniklal Nanchand Shah and his extended family*



*Ramniklal Shah in 1942*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book could not have been written without help from Ramniklal Shah's family. They provided valuable information, stories and rare family photographs. I thank them wholeheartedly.

Thanks to Har Mandir Singh 'Hamraaz' for providing source material in the form of old books, magazines and film booklets.

Thanks to my guru, mentor and friend Professor Raj Kumar Pathria for introducing me to Salim Shah, that's how it all got started.

A big thanks to my wife Harmesh, and three children, Jai, Libby, and Raja, and, special huggable thanks to Benjamin, for always being there for me.

Professor Surjit Singh
East Lansing, MI
June 2024

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# PREFACE

I saw my first movie in 1952. It was called Shreematiji and I was hooked. Through the years I watched movies of all kinds, listened their music via Radio and records played in paan shops, weddings and other functions.

Then in 1975, when I returned from the US after my PhD and joined Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Colaba, Bombay, I got an opportunity to listen the music of the 30s and 40s. Also I saw lots of movies made the 40s in old cinema halls in the Grant Road area.

I developed a fascination the early history of Indian cinema. Thanks to the legendary Hindi Film Geet Kosh by 'Hamraaz', I learned a lot of names of producers, directors, music directors, lyricists and actors of the early talkie era.

When I returned to the US again in the 80s, many of early movies became available, first as Video Cassettes then as VCDs and DVDs. I bought all of them and watched them again and again.

A unique opportunity arose in 2017, when Prof Pathria, whom I have known since 1967, mentioned one day that one of the stars of the early talkies, Indurani, had lived in San Diego, where I working for a Business Analytics Company. He introduced me to her eldest son, Salim Shah and that is how I ended up writing a book on Indurani (or to give her original name, Ishrat Jehan Imamuddin).

She was married to Ramniklal Shah and I wrote a brief chapter on him in the book on Indurani. It has always at the back of my mind to expand that chapter into a book.

Ramniklal Shah was a partner in a major studio, Mohan Studios and many famous films were shot there. For example, the Sheesh Mahal set for the 50s blockbuster Mughal-e-Azam was built there.

His name is found in old books and magazines, but he is now long-forgotten. I sincerely believe that memories of such pioneers must be kept alive for future generations.

I am playing a small part in this effort and this book is the result.

# INTRODUCTION

## THE STUDIO SYSTEM

(Note: Adapted from my book on Indurani.)

For the pioneers of cinema things were difficult. Still a few enterprising individuals in many cities took it upon themselves to obtain the financing, buy the equipment, learn how to use it, learn how to develop and print the exposed film, find the players and make films. They hired people on a monthly salary with contracts, and the studio system was born.

Early financing was obtained by borrowing money from family and friends. Once the films were seen to be earning money, the traditional lenders (but not the banks) were persuaded to lend money. The financial needs kept increasing. For example, new equipment was needed for the talkies. So, films needed to be made quickly and cheaply. This was done at first by simply filming the stage plays, or imitating stories from Hollywood, or shooting many films at the same time. Ranjit Studios is reputed to have made as many as nine films in one year!

### Life in a Studio

All the processing was done in the studio at night, while the

shooting took place during the day. The laboratory was attached to the studio and had its own staff. Processing included developing, editing, and any tricks involving double exposure or other special effects. Initially the negatives were developed in short lengths, a shot or take at a time, later continuous printers arrived. In the early days one or two technicians did everything, they had to know all the technical aspects of film making and there was no specialization.

Here is Durga Khote talking about Prabhat Studios,[1]

> **In those days the scripts were completely ready.... We knew, far in advance, what songs and what dialog we were to render.... At Prabhat we were to report at work at 5:30 in the morning and we knew that shooting would be definitely over by 4:30 in the afternoon. There was no departure from this routine as shooting was done in sunlight and no artificial lights or arcs were in vogue then.... We were called for work at 5:30 because it took two full hours for make-up with the hard grease of old days. By 8:00 we were ready for "take" and by tea-time we used to pack up as no more shooting was possible with the fading sunlight.**

As mentioned above, in the beginning the studios filmed stage plays, the actors came from the theater. They stayed on to act in films because the life was easier here and they could live in one city instead of traveling from city to city. The actors were rehearsed and directions were given during the shooting. When talkies came, the theater-trained actors were taught not to speak or sing too loudly, and, do so not to the invisible audience but to the camera and the microphone.

Every studio had its dedicated roster of actors on its payroll. Ranjit Studios probably had the largest number of stars of those

1 Bibliography is at the end..

days. Among the people who had worked with them at one time or another, one list has Raja Sandow, Master Vithal, Saigal, Khursheed, Madhuri, Sulochana, E Billimoria, Motilal, Ishwarlal, Charlie, Dixit, Kesri, Jagdish Sethi, Kumar, Zia Sarhadi, Bulo C Rani, Khemchand Prakash, Chaturbhuj Doshi, Manibhai Vyas, Gyandutt. Of course, Gauhar was their most visible star.

## Downfall of the Studios

Once in a while the studios loaned their stars to others. At other times they poached by enticing them with higher salaries or better terms. Here is an early example involving the hero of the first talkie, Master Vithal. He was on contract with the Sharda Film Co, Bombay, and was so successful in the silent movies that he was known as India's Douglas Fairbanks. Imperial Film Co, Bombay, offered him more money, so he quietly went to work for them. Nanabhai Desai of Sharda, somehow found out. He went to Bombay to meet him and convinced him to travel with him to Poona. Once there, Desai locked him up in a room, but treated him well. He tried to persuade him to return to Sharda, but Vithal did not budge. Imperial found out and sued Sharda. Sharda hired Mr M A Jinnah (yes, the same one) and Imperial hired another famous lawyer Sir Jamshedji Byramji Kanga. Long story short, the judge asked Vithal whom would he rather work for. He said the one that gave him more money! So, an auction ensued right there in the court room, and Imperial won by offering Rs 750 per month, whereas a typical star in those days got Rs 300.

Soon the stars realized that a lot of money was being made with their names, so they started going to the highest bidders and moving on when somebody offered more money. Other filmi people like story writers, music directors, and lyricists followed suit. This was one of the factors that led to the downfall of the studio system.

Another reason was the growth of the independent laboratories, not attached to any studio. This made it possible for independent producers and directors to hire actors and technicians at will to make

pictures. Also, the studios with multiple stages started to hire out their premises to independent producers, in a bid to make more money.

For other reasons for decline and a very decent discussion of the studio system, see the chapter about the studios in the book edited by Rani Burra.

# RAMNIKLAL SHAH

(Note: Adapted from my book on Indurani.)

Ramniklal Nanchand Shah was a Jain whose ancestors migrated from the Saurashtra region of Gujarat in the late nineteenth century to the Mysore state. Ramniklal was born in Vartej near Bhavnagar in 1910. He tried many ventures, including becoming a touring talkie operator, carrying his equipment from place to place. Later he joined forces with his uncle, Mohanlal Tarachand Shah to set up film distribution in the South Circuit. Once when a Kurla Road studio in Andheri, Bombay, could not deliver films for which they had given funds in advance, they took over the studio and renamed it Mohan Pictures. Their firm, Ramniklal Mohanlal and Co, with offices on Khetwadi Main Road, Bombay, besides owning the studio, also owned the Broadway Theater in Dadar, and Mohan Talkies in Bhavnagar, Gujarat.

As was the custom in those days, the studios operated as a well-oiled machine. Very professional story writers, screenplay authors, dialog writers, lyricists and music directors prepared the ground work. The director and the cameramen knew exactly what to do. Like in an extended family everybody knew what was expected of them, arrived on time, finished their assigned duties with gusto. That is how the studios in those days were able to make so many films every year.

Mohan Pictures studio was run in the same way. It had four

sound stages (in the beginning) and had an attached processing laboratory. Although it was owned by the uncle-nephew team, it was 'run on cooperative basis by the staff'. It was probably bought in 1935 or 1936, because they had already produced *Danger Signal* (1937), *Kul Deepak* (1937), and were in the middle of producing *Bhedi Trishool* (1938), *Chabukwali* (1938), *Cyclewali* (1938), and, *Jungle Ka Jawan* (1938), before they produced their first picture with Indurani, *Veer Bala* (1938). In fact, in the book *Films 1944* (Roopbani Publications, publisher unknown), there was an article on Ramniklal with the headline, *The Man Who Produced More Pictures Than He Is Old*.

In the beginning, all the well-known studios had their staff of actors, actresses, producers, directors and technical staff etc. So they produced their own movies. Eventually, the studios started to hire out the studio to outside producers. For example the famous Sheesh Mahal sequence of the classic *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) was shot on one of the Mohan Studios sound stages. [According to Salim Shah, who accompanied Ramniklal Shah to collect the rental check of Rs 10,000 from Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry, the financier, in 1958 or 1959.]

# Indurani

Indurani (born as Ishrat Jehan) was born to Sheikh Imamuddin and Munawwar Jehan of Delhi. Her mother had a diploma in medicine from She decided to enroll in *The Ayurvedic and Unani Tibbia College*, popularly known as *Tibbia College*. She practiced medicine in Delhi and also went to far off places such as Janjira State on the Konkan Coast in Maharashtra, and, later, in the Tonk State in Rajasthan. Her father was involved in various businesses. He started a rifle and gun selling business mainly catering to the hunting enthusiasts. The business flourished during the British Raj, but came to an end during the Congress Government Raj after 1947, when his license to sell was taken away. He had a knack of repairing mechanical and electrical gadgets such as bicycles, watches, clocks, radios and gramophone players.

Indurani and her sister Sarojini (born Roshan Jehan) used to read

filmi magazines. In one of them they saw an ad for leading ladies, they sent photos to Saraswati Cinetone, Poona, traveled there with their father and were given contracts at Rs 300 per month. Indurani had small role in *Savitri* (1936). Later they decided to try their luck in Bombay and were on contract with Minerva Studios for few years.

One day Mohanlal Shah, a partner in Mohan Pictures, saw a big poster of the movie *Bulldog* (1937) in Super Talkies, Bombay. There was Indurani in all her beauty. He was so impressed by her looks that he decided that they should hire her for their studio. So, he sent his nephew Ramniklal Shah (Mohanlal's partner) for this task. Ramniklal took his friend Nanabhai Bhatt with him and went to Indurani's flat.

At this time, Indurani had already been hired by the Minerva Studios at a salary of Rs 450, but Ramniklal offered Rs 500. When she wondered how to get out of the contract with Minerva, Ramniklal mentioned that, she being a minor, the contract was not legally binding! So she and her sister Sarojini walked over from Minerva Studios to Mohan Pictures, for a gain of Rs 50 a month. Indurani spent the rest of her filmi career at Mohan Pictures, where Ramniklal fell 'head over heels' in love with her.

As Indurani told Nagma, she had rejected at least two other suitors before saying yes to Ramniklal. The famous actor Jayant (real name Zakaria Khan, father of Amjad Khan of *Sholay* 1975 fame) wished to marry her but he smoked a lot. Character actor Hari Shivdasani had also expressed an interest, but she found him to be too flamboyant. He is the father of Babita, famous actress from the 60s and, grandfather of Karishma and Kareena Kapoor. In fact, once when Kareena came to Los Angeles for shooting, Indurani wanted to meet her and tell her about Hari Shivdasani, but it could not be arranged.

Indurani was one of their biggest stars. She arrived in Bombay in 1935 and started appearing in movies. Before joining Mohan Studios, she had already acted in *Ishrat Ki Maut* (1935), *Shree Satya Narayan* (1935), *Savitri* (Marathi, 1936), *Fida-e-Watan* (1936), *Pratima* (1936),

*Bull Dog* (1937), *Insaaf* (1937), *Meri Bhool* (1937), *Mr X* (1938), and, *Sunehra Baal* (1938) with half a dozen producers.

With Mohan Pictures, she made 13 films in five years (1938-1942, one was released in 1949), working with many famous actors and directors. The pictures were of various types, fantasy, mythological, "stunt", costume drama and social. She played a variety of roles, and, in a few of them sang songs for herself, according to Salim. Unfortunately, except for the Marathi film mentioned earlier, none of her movies are traceable. The ones with Mohan Pictures perished in a storage facility fire in early 1950s, a fate met by many other studios' films, notably Ranjit Studios.

**Rena Shah describes the incident:**

**And yes, there was a fire that burned all the film. They were stored in large reels, I remember made of aluminum.**

**He had rented the movie studio to someone, they were filming a village scene. It had a haystack in the set. Someone left a lamp burning inside. I believe my Dad thought the lamp got tipped over by Rats (possibly), and lit the haystack. Inside that same movie set, (the sets were in large buildings) was the storage for all the big reels, the film was extremely flammable. The whole studio set burned to the ground. And along with it all the movies. Very few copies of movies were made in those days. I remember my father discussing the fire with me. It must have been devastating for him. But he had an amazing outlook on life. He really took the meaning, "we are here today", literally. My mother told me that the fire was visible for many many miles.**

**Fahim Shah adds:**

**Village hut scene. Hut caught on fire with Kerosene**

**lamp that was used in villages instead of electricity.**

Continuing with Indurani, she enjoyed her work and wanted to continue working in films. But, a tragedy occurred in 1942. She was pregnant with a child, when during a stunt shooting, the horse ran very fast, and she lost the pregnancy. Because of this, she became depressed for a time. After that, she did not work in films any more.

Indurani's eldest daughter Hashmat tells a story from about 1950, when her mother sitting on the marble steps leading to the house, was cleaning some wheat, before it could be given to servant to take it to a mill for grinding. A producer or a director came and told her that he wanted to meet Indurani. She lifted her eyes to look at him and said, *Main Hee Hoon* [I am her]. The visitor was shocked.

# MEMORIES

## Salim Shah

Ramniklal Nanchand Shah was born in 1911 in Vartej, a small town near Bhavnagar, Gujarat. I don't recall how close it is to the major Jain pilgrimage site of Palitana, but the family were Jains. His father Nanchand T. Shah was the oldest son of Tarachand. Nanchand had two brothers Mohanlal and Rasiklal. Ramniklal was orphaned as a young boy. His mother died when he was a baby and father died when he was 7 or 8. In those days some members of the greater family had migrated to find business opportunities in Bangalore. He was taken along with with his uncle Mohanlal to be raised there. He worked with others in a family cloth store. In time he was given the task of running a bicycle parts store. One of the family members had started a film exhibition company.

Mohanlal became adept at booking films for the southern territory. Once the film had been shown in local theaters one could still earn money by showing it in smaller towns or villages without a theater. Ramniklal would venture out with an assistant, a projector and reels to show the film on a cotton fabric sheet in such locations to generate more revenue. These ventures got the two men a source of capital to finance studio owner producers to pick coming releases under production. Risks were higher but the duo would get a lien on studio property in case of non fulfillment of contract.

Thus when a studio owner in Andheri defaulted the duo who had registered a partnership, Ramniklal Mohanlal and Company took over the studio and renamed it Mohan Studios. It had a few stages but under the management of operating partner young Ramniklal Mohan studio achieved fame as having the latest technology on its many stages (final count 7). Besides financing other talented producers Ramniklal produced over 35 films by age 26.

## Kishore R Shah

I am Kishore Shah, son of Late Mrs. Chanchal Ben & Late Mr.

Ramniklal Nanchand Shah. I am one of five children they had together. I was the middle child.

My older sisters are :

1) Late Pushpa Pravinchandra Parekh

2) Manjula Kantilal Mehta

My younger sisters are :

1) Aruna Dilip Parekh

2) Anila Kirti Shah

We are all Gujarati Jains.

I was born on 21st of February 1945. Growing up, I stayed with my parents, siblings and extended family in an apartment in Chowpatty, Mumbai.

In 1967 my parents, younger unmarried siblings, and I moved to a bungalow in Mohan Studio (Andheri), Mumbai. Soon after, I got married to Usha I started working in the film industry full time.

It was also around then that I came to know about my "other" family.

My relationship with my co-mother Indurani was always warm and cordial. She moved to the US after my father's death and stayed with his son Fahim, but we met on her regular visits back to Mumbai.

My relationship with my 2 half brothers (Salim Bhai & Fahim) and 4 half sisters (Hashmat, Dilshad, Nagma and Rena) has grown over the years. They all live in the US but do visit us whenever they come to Mumbai. They relish our home cooked Gujarati meals, and

always we our nostalgic conversations.

My wife and I have fond memories of our week-long stay with Fahim on our visit to the US. Starting with Mrs. Indurani surprising us by coming to the airport to pick us up in a wheelchair, to all my half-sisters spending quality time with us, it was all lovely. They all showered us with attention and affection which left us wishing we could have stayed longer.

Unfortunately, that was the last time I met my co-mother who passed away a few years later.

**Regarding Mohan Studio and my father** (whatever my fading memory recalls)

My father was a noble soul. Extremely kind, gentle and always ready to help the needy. I never saw him lose his temper. His compassion, cool composure and enterprising spirit is what made him a successful businessman who grew Mohan studio to its glorious heights.

At one time Mohan Studio was the biggest film studio of Mumbai.

The studio offered all the facilities required to shoot films. It had five stages/studios that were fully equipped with cameras, lights, recording equipments, props etc. It had several makeup rooms, office spaces for producers, huge place for storing shooting properties, etc. Besides the indoor stages, the studio was fortunate to have huge open grounds and gardens that fulfilled the needs for outdoor shoots.

The studio was equipped with advanced technical equipment required for editing, sound transfer etc. It also had a preview theatre, dubbing theatre and several other amenities that were needed for post-production work. It had a laboratory for processing film negatives and positives that no other studio in Mumbai could boast

of at that time.

Starting from the era of silent movies, my father went on to produce many films in Hindi and other languages under the banner of Ramnik Productions, Shah Pictures, Mohan Pictures etc.

He had film distribution offices in Mumbai & New Delhi under the name of Ramniklal Mohanlal & Co.

He owned cinema theatres in Mumbai, Maharashtra & Bhavnagar, Gujarat.

He also helped many producers and directors by providing required funds for production of films.

Besides all the legendary in-house productions, over the years several blockbuster movies were shot at this studio including the epic Mughal-E-Azam. It was the preferred studio of many prominent filmmakers like Bimal Roy, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Gulzar, K. Asif, Hemant Kumar, Prakash Mehra, Sultan Ahmed, Rajshri Productions, N. C. Sippy, N. N. Sippy, Sunil Dutt, L. B. Laxman, Rajkumar Kohli, Shashi Kapoor, O. P. Ralhan and many more.

Since the studio was a popular choice of filmmakers, it was the only studio that had exclusive make-up rooms - one for superstar Rajesh Khanna & the other for Amitabh Bachchan.

Over the years my dad grew his skills in film production, distribution and exhibition making him one of the most multi-faceted and experienced visionaries of the film industry during his time.

He left us too early. We continue to miss him and his magnanimous presence.

As for Mohan Studio, even decades after its closure, it is still remembered fondly by many.

## Rena Ratan Shah

I am the youngest of 11 children. He was older when I was born and he doted on me! I'm supposed to be the reincarnation of his mother, Ratan Bai. My father was orphaned at an early age.

He really spoiled me the most (I think)!!!

He loved going to Modern sweets in Santa Cruz market, shopping for clothes for my mother and me!

He enjoyed going to Powai Lake and always had bananas for the poor and bread for the birds at the lake.

He loved to wear fine cotton shirts, well stitched pants and always carried a handkerchief sprayed with Eau de Cologne.

He enjoyed eating Farsan and Gujarati food.

He was generous to all that he met and gave a lot to charity, and often giving money to others to start their businesses.

He didn't talk much, but when he did, he mostly had something wise to say.

He was always generous with his thoughts towards faith and religion. I never heard him disrespect anyone's faith. I remember him telling me as a child "Ishwar Allah tera naam"!!!

He didn't want me to be sent to America.

Sadly I did, and missed the latter years of his life.

When he was orphaned, he made money by selling cheese cloth and spices then traveled by bullock cart and showed movies in villages? It was typically a three month circuit.

One of his favorite outings was picnics at Powai Lake and going to the Aarey Milk Colony and buying me ice cold strawberry milk!

He was very involved with shadow and hand reading, both for his personal and professional life. He always consulted "Jyotshi" (I forget his name), and even bought the astrologer/seer, a place to live!

My mother, Ishrat Indurani was his second wife.

He was a simple man. He liked his clean white or pastel colored western cotton clothes.

His best friend was Babuji (don't know his real name), and every evening after school we enjoyed tea time with Babuji and myself. (The older children were either in college or abroad). My mother would prepare home cooked goodies for tea time.

Whenever he visited, it was a special time for us (as the second family), as he diligently went to stay with his first family at Mohan Studios in Andheri. His residence was in the studio itself. His favorite place to buy snacks and sweets was "Modern Sweets" in the Santa Cruz market. They still remember him there. He loved buying Mithai and Farsan everyday. He wasn't allowed Mithai because his diabetes was so severe when I was a kid. But he still bought for everyone. And I got to buy my favorite pedas rolled in sugar and mothichur laddoos. Will never forget those days. And of course his best friend Babuji accompanied us everywhere.

I was very spoiled by my father. I always had hundreds of rupees in my pockets for spending money as early as 6-7 years old. He took me everywhere. As a young girl I used to have a "gaddi" of Rs 500 notes. And unlimited spending at Century Bazaar.

He loved going shopping to buy materials, and saris and clothes. We spent a day every week at the Century Bazaar. (then brand new, first of its kind, Mall)

He loved American cars. I remember many a fond ride in the spacious Studebaker!!!

He sadly spent the latter years of his life fighting squatters at Mohan Studios. He tried to pay them to leave, so the studio would stay as one property. He had given shelter to many workers and they ended up building huts and squatting in the Mohan studio property.

That stress and his advanced diabetes took his life early. He suffered a lot because of his ill health towards the end.

He owned movie theatres and the famous Mohan Studios, and he rented a movie theatre (Hanjar Cinema, Saraspur, Ahmedabad) out for 30 years. So he made some bad investments as most of us do, thus losing a lot of his millions.

After he passed whenever I visited India, the store keepers remembered me as his daughter and let me buy whatever I wanted on credit.

He was planning to come to the US. That's why he got his passport. He never traveled here because he got too sick with his diabetes. He was very against me moving to the USA. I finally made the move in the early 70s. He did not live long after that. Sadly. In the end he didn't want to live. He was suffering with his diabetes and was tired of getting poked all the time for blood draws for tests. He became very thin in the end and he had a lot of bruises because of his diabetes.

My mother was staying with him at Mohan studios to care for him towards the end. He told her to leave the studios, after he died (Mohan Studios, was his residence). He said to not be there as people would be crying and he didn't want her to see that.

I was also staying there with him, I was too young to make any decisions. I remember leaving after he died.

My greatest memory of my father was his kindness and his giving nature. He always gave great advice. He loved his tea time and his snacks. I believe that was his favorite part of the day

**Salim Shah adds:**

Biggest stress was due to the long running court case against The Shalimar theater developer who reneged on lease rent payments after the theater opened. He had set up a trust for all his children to get monthly income in perpetuity. I remember in July 1970 when I visited after 10 years in USA he asked me why I was wasting my time in USA where the employer had not even made me a partner. I'd never have to work back in Mumbai. I told him I was well settled and happier in Los Angeles with my new bride Francoise. She was expecting Alex at that time.

**Shyam Shroff adds:**

I remember Ramnik Bhai and wife Indurani would often take a stroll in the evening from their bungalow at Indranarayan street to the actress Azra's house on the corner of 16th Road and Danda Road. They would walk through Sarojini Road where we stayed and Ramnik Bhai's future son-in-law Rafique too stayed.

## Nagma Gandhi

Some precious memories: as a child my sister Dilshad and I took turns combing his hair. He showed us Jain illustrations, books that depicted your fate for your deeds.

He had a beautiful brass cigarette dispenser in which were displayed the most expensive brand of cigarettes, he did not smoke regularly but this was a fashion. He wore the best silk bush shirts, but did not wear a suit, since it was not suitable for Bombay's humid weather. He only wore expensive slippers from the Gold Field Shoe

Store for the same reason.

When our driver Tulsiram drove, he repeatedly said "hallu hallu", because Tulsiram liked to speed up.

Favorite teatime person guest was Annisley Saheb who spent the winters in Bombay to be away from Scotland. Movie star Shakila's mother Begum (red rouge covered cheeks) spent hours visiting him, to obtain roles for her daughter. Later on movie star Ameeta and her mother came so frequently that I thought of Ameeta as our drawing room couch fixture. His film distributor Nandlal from Delhi and Kantilal from Bangalore were constantly in our house. His nephew Mansukh came frequently. Later in life Chhaya Shastri Kantilal had a big influence on his business decisions and guided him to invest / finance movies that had certain letters in the name. We went on excursions to the lake areas to distribute black cloth to the poor because of Chaya Shastri.

He bought baskets of fruits and when I was a student in Sophia college he opened a credit account for me in Welcome Store on Peddar Road, and would drop of a whole basket of watermelons for me to share with my hostel friends.

We had our own private box for watching movies in Broadway Theater in Dadar. School teachers would ask me for a free pass and he would write it on a card "For Four Guests".

When I left for USA as a foreign student he tried to stop me, he pleaded with me to not to go to paapi mulk (devil country) (maybe because of vegetarianism). He assured that he will provide for us for many generations..

When I returned to get married in 1972, I told him he did not have to buy gold for me. I informed him that I had $13,000 in my bank account, he was so touched he started crying and said, "meri Beti ke paas ek lakh rokda hai". Nevertheless despite his weak condition and failing vision he bought a heavy gold set and many

best quality silk saris for me. He was given a double insulin shot by a pharmacist friend. That led to an insulin shock resulting in a weak heart, which led to an early demise at age 62.

# MOHAN STUDIOS

The joint production company in which he and his uncle were partners worked under two banners are Mohan Pictures and Mohan Studios.

According to the Censor Board information published in the Government Gazette, the list o films is as follows:

## Banner: Mohan Pictures

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1937 | Danger Signal | Stunt |
| 1937 | Kul Deepak | Stunt |
| 1938 | Bhedee Trishool | Mythical |
| 1938 | Chaabukavaalee | Costume Drama |
| 1938 | Cyclevaalee | Stunt |
| 1938 | Jangal Kaa Javaan | Costume Drama |
| 1938 | Veer Baalaa | Costume Drama |
| 1939 | Bahaadur Ramesh | Stunt |
| 1939 | Bhedee Kumaar | Costume Drama |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1939 | Chashmaavaalee | Costume Drama |
| 1939 | Kaalaa Jigar | Stunt |
| 1939 | Midnight Mail | Costume Drama |
| 1939 | Ran Sangraam | Costume Drama |
| 1939 | Ratnaa Lutaaree | Social |
| 1939 | Svaastik | Social |
| 1940 | Captain Kishoree | Costume Drama |
| 1940 | Deepak Mahal | Mythical |
| 1940 | Haatimataaee Kee Betee | Mythical |
| 1940 | Hamaaraa Desh | Stunt |
| 1940 | Jaaduee Kangan | Mythical |
| 1940 | Jagat Mohinee | Social |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1940 | Thief Of Tatar | Mythical |
| 1941 | Allaadeen Lailaa | Social |
| 1941 | Bulabul-E-Baghdad | Stunt |
| 1941 | Jaaduee Bandhan | Social |
| 1941 | Muslim Kaa Laal | Social |
| 1941 | Shaahazaadee | Social |
| 1941 | Taaj Mahal | Stunt |
| 1942 | Bahaanaa | Social |
| 1942 | Faramaan | Stunt |
| 1942 | Motorvaalee | Social |
| 1942 | Sarovar Kee Sundaree | Social |
| 1942 | Zevar | Social |
| 1943 | Jaaduee Jhoolaa | Social |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1943 | Nayaa Zamaanaa | Social |
| 1944 | Bandookavaalee | Historical |
| 1944 | Jaaduee Qismat | Costume Drama |
| 1945 | Allaadeen | Stunt |
| 1946 | Aleebaabaa | Social |
| 1946 | Arab Kaa Chaand | Devotional |
| 1946 | Baghdad Kaa Chor | Historical |
| 1946 | Hoor-E-Baghdad | Mythological |
| 1946 | Hoor-E-Jangal | Mythical |
| 1946 | Sindabaad The Sailor | Social |
| 1947 | Angoorabaalaa | Social |
| 1947 | Himmatavaalee | Stunt |
| 1947 | Qismat Kaa Sitaaraa | Social |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1947 | Mr Dynamite | Stunt |
| 1947 | Naiyaa | Stunt |
| 1948 | Ghaibee Talavaar | Costume Drama |
| 1948 | Hind Mail | Social |
| 1948 | Jaaduee Angoothee | Social |
| 1948 | Jaaduee Bansaree | Social |
| 1948 | Jaaduee Shahanaaee | Social |
| 1948 | Ratan Manjaree | Social |
| 1949 | Alaauddeen Kee Betee | Costume Drama |
| 1949 | Black Terror | Legendary |
| 1949 | Jaaduee Sindoor | Stunt |
| 1949 | Policevaalee | Social |
| 1949 | Roop Basant | Social |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1950 | Bheemasen | Social |
| 1950 | Raaj Mukut | Social |
| 1951 | Raam Janm | Mythical |
| 1951 | Sarakaar | Costume Drama |

## Banner: Mohan Studios

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1952 | Chham Chhamaa Chham | Social |

In addition, he alone produced some more social films under Ramnik Productions.

## Banner: Ramnik Productions

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1943 | Dulhan | Social |
| 1943 | Rekhaa | Social |
| 1944 | Kiran | Social |
| 1945 | Taaraamatee | Social |
| 1945 | Veer Kunaal | Social |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1945 | Village Girl | Social |
| 1946 | Bachchon Kaa Khel | Social |

Sadly, none of the movies are available because they perished in the fifties. Apparently, this was a common occurrence, and a large number of early movies cannot be seen now.

Apart from this, the Studio stages were rented out to other producers. A lot of movies were shot on those seven sound stages. The list is incomplete because, as said above, the early movies are not available.

It is generally hard to know with any authenticity which films ere shot in which studios. Currently it is believed that the following films were shot there.

# Films Shot in Mohan Studios Sound Stages

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1953 | Alif-Laila |
| 2 | 1957 | Apradhi Kaun? |
| 3 | 1957 | Musafir |
| 4 | 1958 | Madhumati |
| 5 | 1958 | Lajwanti |
| 6 | 1960 | Mughal-e-Azam |
| 7 | 1960 | Sujata |
| 8 | 1961 | Mem-Didi |
| 9 | 1961 | Jhumroo |
| 10 | 1961 | Aas Ka Panchhi |
| 11 | 1961 | Maya |
| 12 | 1961 | Char Diwari |
| 13 | 1962 | Anpadh |
| 14 | 1962 | Prem Patra |
| 15 | 1962 | Aashiq |
| 16 | 1963 | Bandini |
| 17 | 1963 | Mujhe Jeene Do |
| 18 | 1963 | Yeh Dil Kisko Doon |
| 19 | 1963 | Nartakee |
| 20 | 1964 | Aap Ki Parchhaiyan |
| 21 | 1964 | Majboor |
| 22 | 1965 | Shaheed |
| 23 | 1965 | Bedaag |
| 24 | 1966 | Anupama |

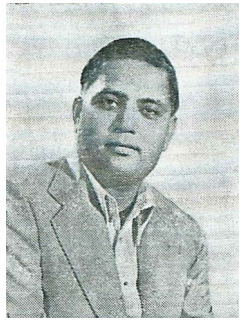
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 25 | 1966 | Phool Aur Patthar |
| 26 | 1966 | Gaban |
| 27 | 1966 | Husn Aur Ishq |
| 28 | 1968 | Suhaag Raat |
| 29 | 1968 | Anokhi Raat |
| 30 | 1968 | Baazi |
| 31 | 1969 | Sachaai |
| 32 | 1970 | Safar |
| 33 | 1970 | Dastak |
| 34 | 1970 | Bhai Bhai |
| 35 | 1970 | Yaadgaar |
| 36 | 1970 | Ilzam |
| 37 | 1971 | Aap Aye Bahaar Ayee |
| 38 | 1971 | Hungama |
| 39 | 1972 | Seeta Aur Geeta |
| 40 | 1972 | Bombay to Goa |
| 41 | 1972 | Annadata |
| 42 | 1973 | Namak Haraam |
| 43 | 1973 | Heera |
| 44 | 1974 | Roti Kapada Aur Makaan |
| 45 | 1974 | Benaam |
| 46 | 1974 | Naya Din Nai Raat |
| 47 | 1974 | Crime and Punishment |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 48 | 1975 | Dharmatma |
| 49 | 1975 | Mili |
| 50 | 1975 | Prem Kahani |
| 51 | 1975 | Zameer |
| 52 | 1975 | Sanyasi |
| 53 | 1975 | Chaitali |
| 54 | 1976 | Nagin |
| 55 | 1976 | Do Anjaane |
| 56 | 1976 | Zindagi |
| 57 | 1977 | Inkaar |
| 58 | 1977 | Kotwal Saab |
| 59 | 1978 | Dillagi |
| 60 | 1978 | Naukri |
| 61 | 1978 | Kaala Aadmi |
| 62 | 1979 | Jaani Dushman |
| 63 | 1979 | Natwarlal |
| 64 | 1980 | Abdullah |
| 65 | 1980 | Do Aur Do Paanch |
| 66 | 1980 | Thodisi Bewafaii |
| 67 | 1980 | Jwalamukhi |
| 68 | 1980 | Chunaoti |
| 69 | 1981 | Kaalia |
| 70 | 1981 | Ladies Tailor |

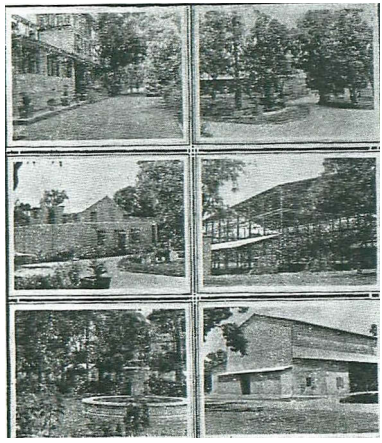
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 71 | 1982 | Dharam Kanta |
| 72 | 1982 | Chorni |
| 73 | 1986 | Tan-Badan |
| 74 | 1987 | Kachchi Kali |
| 75 | 1988 | Shiva Shakti |
| 76 | 1995 | Raasaiyya |

Photos from a book in 1952

*Seth Mohanlal Shah (1952)*



*Seth Ramniklal Shah (1952)*



*Mohan Studios (1952)*

MOHAN PICTURES, (Part: Mohanlal T. Shah & Ramniklal M. Shah), Kurla Road, Andheri.

RAMNIK PRODUCTIONS, (Ramniklal Mohanlal & Co.), Khetwadi Main Road, Bombay 4.

The last two rows show the entries among production companies.

Here is the whole article from the book.

SETH Mohanlal Tarachand, J. P., and Seth Ramniklal Nanchand, of Messrs Ramniklal Mohanlal & Co., Bombay, are two great personalities in Indian film industry, trading in all branches. They have the biggest studio "MOHAN STUDIOS" with five stages, a Laboratory and a preview theatre. The studio is well-equipped with up-to-date machinery. Having 4 recording machines, (2 R.C.A.) and 4 movie cameras, in their studio, simultaneously 3 to 4 pictures can be shot in a shift. *IN 1947-48, MOHAN STUDIOS CREATED A RECORD OF 25 PICTURES IN A YEAR.*

Seth Mohanlal Tarachand

Seth Ramniklal Shah

It was in 1935, they started their distribution office in Bombay, with a very small capital. By their perseverance and business acumen, within a couple of years they mastered the distribution line. Having studied the public taste, they went in production and produced popular pictures. In their earlier production activities they produced stunt pictures establishing their name. It was in wartime that they turned to produce social and mythological pictures.

Their, 'TARAMATI', 'VILLAGE-GIRL', 'RAJ MUKUT', 'BHIMSEN', 'SARKAR' and other pictures have celebrated Silver Jubilees at many key stations. At present they are producing a big picture "CHHAM CHHAMA CHHAM" which is being directed by Mr. Santoshi.

Messrs Ramniklal Mohanlal & Co., have established a reputation and is one of those very few in the line, who have regard in the trade. They themselves are producers and above all they are the producer-makers. Many producer-directors, artists, technicians and others owe their film life to Messrs Ramniklal Mohanlal. (advt.)

*Left:* Views of the Studio

240 ASIAN FILM DIRECTORY & WHO'S WHO 1952

From an article in 2018

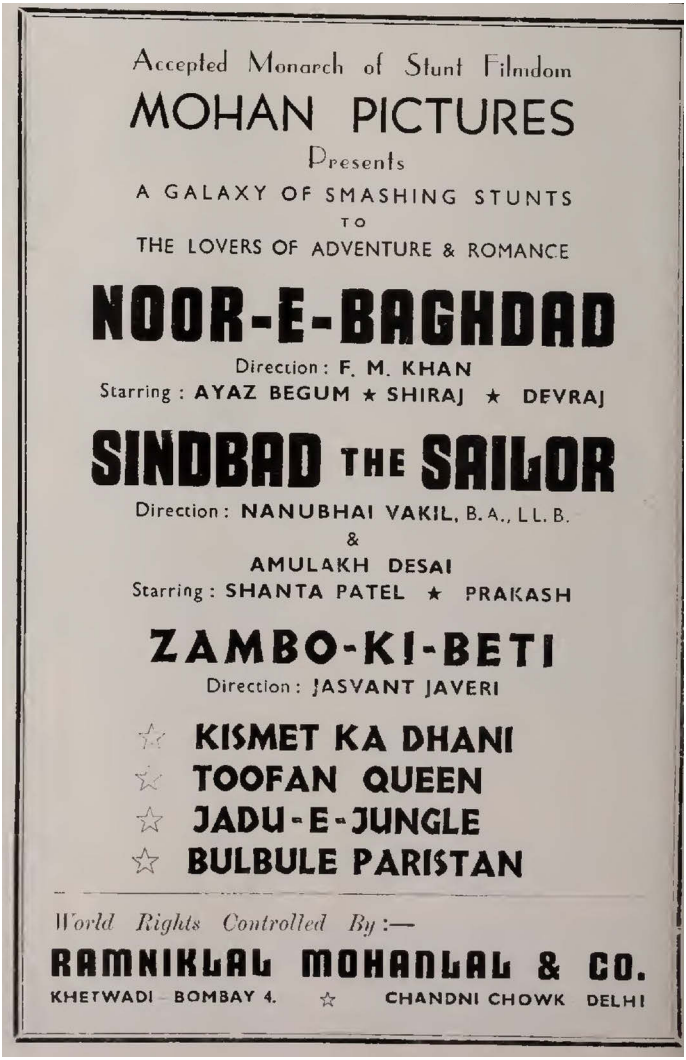
MOHAN STUDIO
Eastern Agencies Healthcare Private Limited.
HSE NO 6 MOHAN STUDIO, CHAKALA, ANDHERI KURLA ROAD,
ANDHERI EAST, MUMBAI 400 099.
STORES

*Photo Courtesy: Rohit Sharma (2018)*

# PHOTO GALLERY

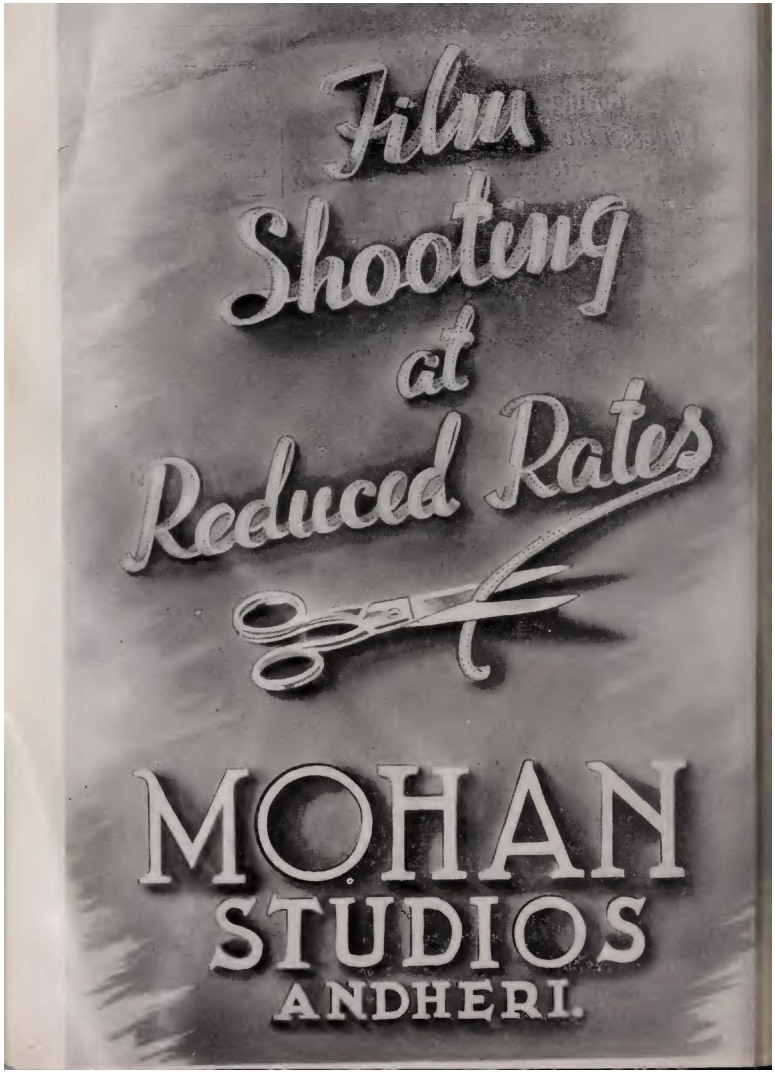
# From Magazines and Books

## From filmindia

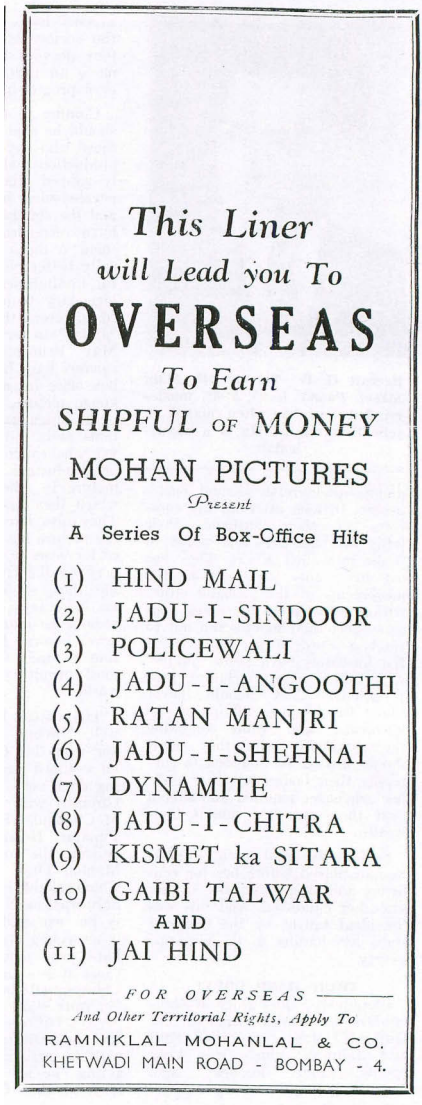



*Mohan Pictures Ad*

*Mohan Studios Ad*




*Mohan Studios Ad*




*Mohan Studios Ad for overseas distribution*

**Seth Ramniklal the energetic partner of Mohan Studios.**

*From a magazine (1949)*

# RAMNIKLAL N. SHAH

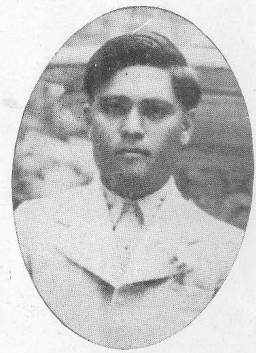
## The Man Who Produced more pictures than the number of years he is old

Ramniklal N. Shah is India's youngest producer—and a very successful one at that. Unlike others, he did not start this business as merely an adventurer or even in the spirit of a gamble. Right from the very start he took this profession in right earnest and ran it on sound business lines. The result was bound to be a success.

He realised the fact that the motion picture production is principally based on two things —finance and equipment. These are the very basic necessities of film-making and those who possess both these things can and must be prosperous.

Finance Ramnikbhai had in plenty. It was the equipment that he needed. So instead of working in a hired studio, he purchased one, renovated and re-furnished it with the best equipment.

And now he started to work. Soon he earned the reputation of being a kind-hearted but stern disciplinarian. Naturally



Seth Ramnikbhai

the best staff of technicians, artistes and office people began to gather in his studios and within the twinkling of an eye, Mohan studios was the first ranker and reached the highest tops in stunt pictures and thrillers.

Another thing very noteworthy about him was the terrific speed with which he gave out pictures after pictures from his studio. And still greater credit goes to him for the fact that he disproved the proverb "haste is waste;" instead he produced pictures with speed and yet on even a higher standard than was current for stunt pictures.

That was a great achievement. But Ramnikbhai does not know to be content with past achievements. He must progress and he must go further and further up. That is life to him.

So two years ago, he started a sister concern to produce social hits. Here, he concentrated upon quality instead of quatity. His aim has been to produce good pictures even if they take time.

Within two years he has given us some 5 pictures and all of them have brought him due profits.

Writing about him two years ago I said in the headlines: "Ramnikbhai they name is efficiency" and in fact my casual remark has become a proverb by now for journalists and studio staff.

*Article on Ramnik Shah Page 1*

For Ramnikbhai is nothing if not thoroughly efficient.

And his love of thoroughness and of efficient work is going to take Ramnikbhai higher and higher in the sphere of film business and I am looking forward to the day when he will be commonly called the film king like the leaders of other businesses as cotton king etc.

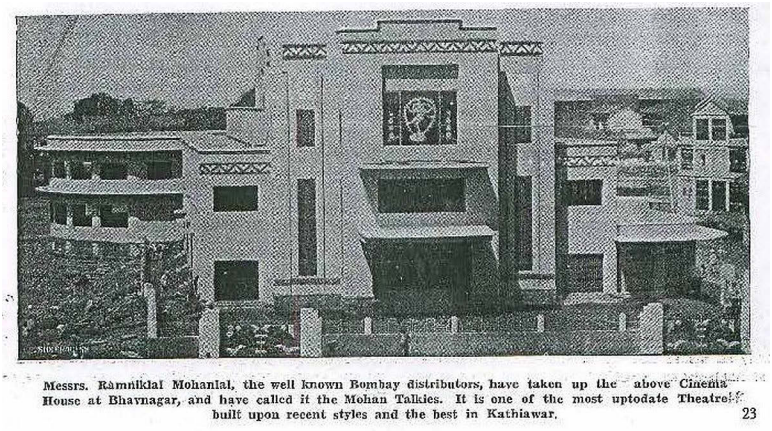
No reference to Ramnikbhai is complete without mentioning his loving brother Mohanbhai whose very smile is so bewitching. And yet he is a great business man.

Others in his staff whom I had occasion to meet are Mr. U.B. Kantharia whose services have been transfered from the studio to the cinema house and Mr. J.C. Solanki who is Publicity Manager and production in charge.

Both these gentlemen are an asset to the concern. Mr. Solanki belongs to northern India and therefore is an expert in the publicity of Hindustani pictures in all languages. His academic qualifications (He is an M.A.) go a long way in the excellent quality of publicity he is putting forth.

In the end, I repeat what I have said above that I look forward to the day when Ramnikbhai will be commonly called the king of film business. I wish and hope that day will come soon.

*Article on Ramnik Shah Page 2*



Messrs. Ramniklal Mohanlal, the well known Bombay distributors, have taken up the above Cinema House at Bhavnagar, and have called it the Mohan Talkies. It is one of the most uptodate Theatres built upon recent styles and the best in Kathiawar. 23

*Cinema Hall in Bhavnagar bought by Mohanlal and Ramniklal*

## From a book on Indian cinema published in 1958.

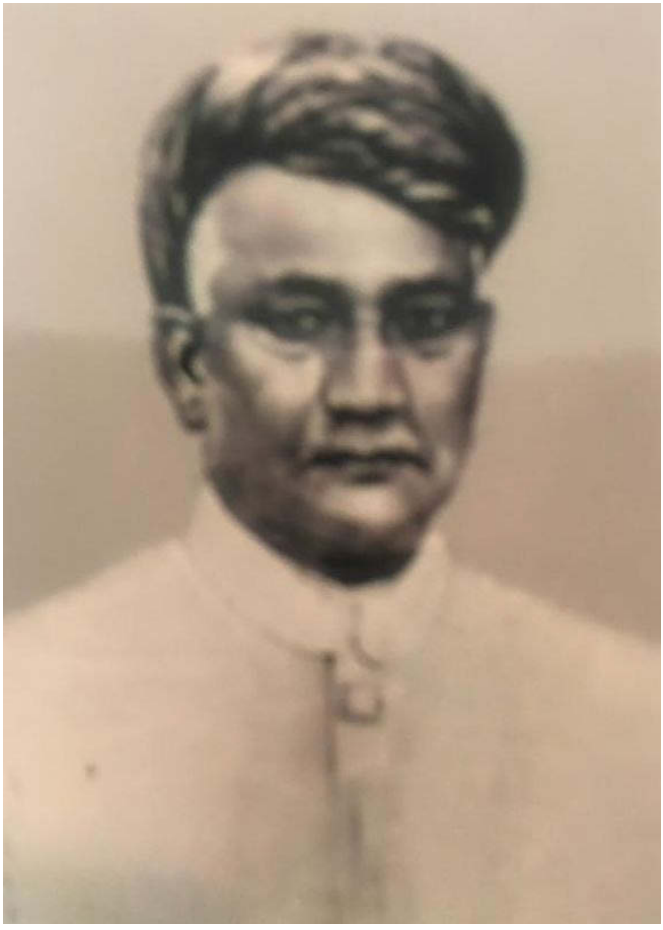
Mohan Pictures Studios, Kurla-Andheri, Bombay

Established 1937. It has 5 Stages. Roughly 100 × 50 × 30, 100 × 50 × 24, 100 × 305 × 25, 100 × 80 × 34, 112 × 50 × 24 Feet. There is one attached Laboratory. Proprietor Ramniklal Shah.

An earlier entry for the studio (1953)

**MOHAN PICTURES :—Kurla Road, Andh Bombay : Four stages. (100 × 50 × 30', 100' × 24' 100' × 30' × 25', 150' × 80' × 34', 110' × ×24'); a laboratory is attached. Partne Mohanlal T. Shah and Ramniklal N. Shah). (Run on Cooperative basis by the staff).**

# Family Photos



*Ramniklal's father Nanchand Shah*

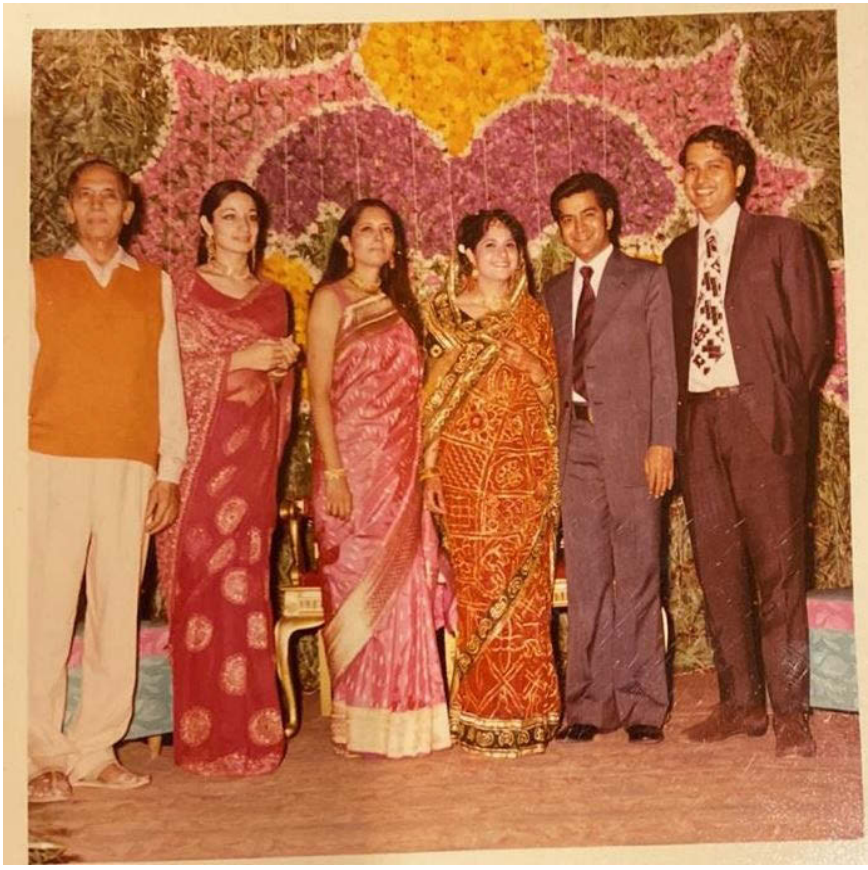
*Ramniklal's mother Ratanbai*

*Unknown, Ramniklal*

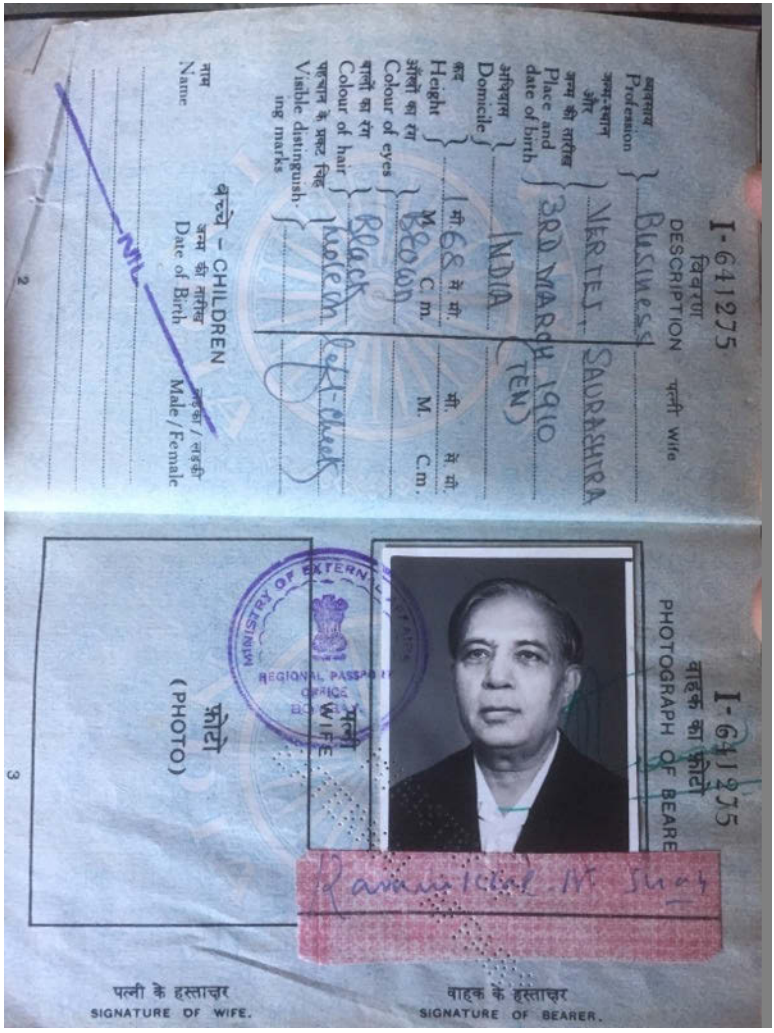
*Indurani, Ramniklal*

*Ramniklal passport photo*

*Ramniklal, Indurani*



*Ramniklal Shah, Huma (movie star Veena's daughter), Hashmat, bride Nagma, groom Khainan Gandhi, Rafique Rahimtoola (Hashmat's husband. November 1972, wedding reception in Ishrat bungalow, Santa Cruz*




*His Passport photo*

*Ramniklal Shah*

*Nagma, Kishore, Fahim, Usha, with Bapa and Chanchalbai in background*

A recent photograph which was taken at our home in Mumbai on 2nd February 2024.

The photo-frames on top are that of my mother Chanchalben & my father Ramniklal N Shah.

Seated from the left:
1. Vishwas - my son
2. Anu - wife of Vishwas
3. Nagma - my half-sister
4. Me - Kishore Ramniklal Shah
5. Fahim – my half brother
6. Usha - my wife.

On the floor from left :
1. Harsh - my grandson (Vishwas' son)

2. Nilufer - wife of Harsh
3. Jeh - my grandson (Vishwas' son) - holding our darling Pablo
4. Khushboo - my daughter
5. Sajeel - husband of Khushboo

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Surjit Singh, a diehard movie fanatic, period. He is a retired Theoretical Physicist. He has been watching Hindi movies since 1952, has been collecting Hindi songs, movies and magazines since 1969, and has been writing about these things since 1996. He has had a website since 1999,

https://hindi-movies-songs.com/joomla/

# OTHER BOOKS BY THE PUBLISHER

For more information please visit

https://hindi-movies-songs.com/joomla/index.php/published-books

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32 WITH YOU, MAA, WITHOUT YOU, OH MAA! by Ali Peter John (2021)

33 The Bitter-Sweet Cocktail, Movies, Music, Wine, Women, The Life and Times of C. Ramchandra by Dilip Shripad Phansalkar (2022)

34 Hindi Talkie Filmography (1951-1960) by Har Mandir Singh 'Hamraaz' and Prof Surjit Singh (2022 English)

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43 History of Indian Cinema by N Ramaswamy (2022)

44 From Jhunjhunu to New York Story of My Life, Part 1 by

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60 Beete Hue Din (Part-2) (Forgotten Memories of Hindi Cinema) by Shishir Krishna Sharma (2023 Hindi)

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